THE ALEXANDER THOMSON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue Nº 36 August 2006

Doors Open Day Members' Evening

Saturday 16 September 2006 7.00pm

We hope you can join us on Saturday for a Members' Evening in the Restaurant of Cathedral House Hotel. This is the third year we have held a Doors Open Day event for our members.

CATHEDRAL HOUSE HOTEL JOHN KNOX STREET GLASGOW - TEL 0141 552 3519

The restaurant is on the first floor and has lovely views of Glasgow Cathedral and the Glsagow Necropolis - a very comfortable place in which to recover from Doors Open Day! There will be an appetising selection from the hot and cold buffet and the cost of £10 per person also includes a glass of wine or soft drink on arrival and coffee later.

Bookings by 13th September 2006 please
Please send a cheque for the sum of £10.00 marked 'ATS Doors Open Day' to
The Alexander Thomson Society, Holmwood, 61-63 Netherlee Road, Glasgow G44 3YU
or phone 0141 554 7207 to book and pay on the night

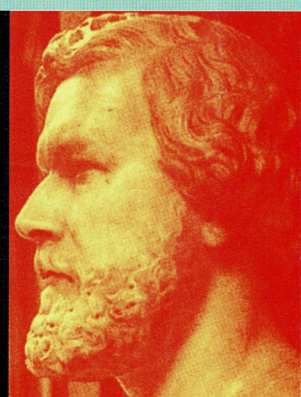


There are tours run by Friends of Glasgow Necropolis and Glasgow Council's Park Rangers round the Glasgow Necropolis 2-4pm on Saturday and Sunday - contact details to book for the tours are on the Doors Open Day leaflet.

THE LAST OF THE WALKS THIS YEAR - COVE AND KILCREGGAN WALK £5.00 - PLEASE BOOK IN ADVANCE Saturday September 23 Start Kilcreggan Pier 11.55. Make your own travel arrangements to the start but we suggest that you purchase an "Open Day Tripper" ticket £8.50 for 1 adult and 2 children or £15 for 2 adults and 4 children (to be used on train, ferry and bus from Cove). Train leaves Glasgow Central Station 10.35 arriving in Gourock 11.27. The ferry from Gourock leaves 11.35, arriving in Kilcreggan 11.47. The fascinating walk along the coast road looks at Thomson villas and other buildings of architectural interest, finishing at Knockderry House Hotel, designed by William Leiper. The return is by the same route reaching the pier for 16.30 ferry which connects with train arriving back at Central Station 17.58 - total walking distance 7 miles. Make cheques payable to Alexander Thomson Society & send with an sae to Holmwood, 61-63 Netherlee Rd, Cathcart, Glasgow G44 3YU - please mark the envelope - Cove and Kilcreggan Walk.

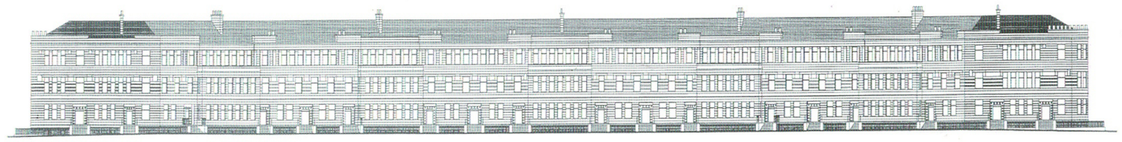
AGM ANNOUNCEMENT - the AGM notice with venue,dates and times will be posted out to you soon

A New Home for the Alexander Thomson Society - The Society's headquarters in the future will be no longer based at Holmwood House. This has prompted thoughts about finding a new home for the Society within another Alexander Thomson building. In the light of this opportunity the committee have also been discussing ways of repositioning the Society more firmly in the public eye. There will be a presentation of some exciting proposals at the forthcoming AGM. Don't miss it!



WALMER CRESCENT BY ROBIN WEBSTER





DRAWING COURTESY THE MACKINTOSH SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Walmer Crescent is one of Thomson's most restrained yet immensely powerful and elegant works. Four storeys (including the basement) of sandstone with a narrow and emphatically repetitive module of mullions in the attic storey and protruding bays, it resolves the architectural termination at either end in different ways. It is, naturally, grade "A" listed, and is the only conservation area in that part of Glasgow, all by itself. It is not, as described by some, totally without decoration (at the first and second story the stone mullions have decorated capitals, and the window heads of the piano nobile have Thomson's familiar continuous linear pattern in relief), but it is certainly quite severe. It has also had to endure some equally severe problems in the past, not all of which have been resolved.

Fifty years after it was built, (in 1857), the then owners of the Crescent decided to build shops upon the gardens that lay between it and Paisley Road West. Contemporary photographs show that at the time these were not entirely without architectural pretension, but since then any unifying aesthetic has been lost, and they are now a jumble of different facades and signs, while the rear elevation (which is what faces the front of the Crescent), is utilitarian in the extreme, with all manner of pipes, ducts and outlets, decaying brickwork, and palisade fencing protecting air-conditioning units to the Co-op. The patched felt roof also supports ventilation ducts, satellite dishes and a varied amount of rubbish regularly deposited there. Still, the shops appear to be economically viable, provide a useful service to the neighbourhood in spite of the





nearby Walmart/Asda superstore, and form a barrier to the noise of traffic in the main road. The mature lime trees support all manner of bird life, although they are badly in need of the attentions of a tree surgeon to allow more light to the Crescent and reduce the amount of debris falling from them. The future of these shops, the landscape to their rear and the trees is critical to the well-being of the Crescent, and it is necessary to consider alternative possibilities.

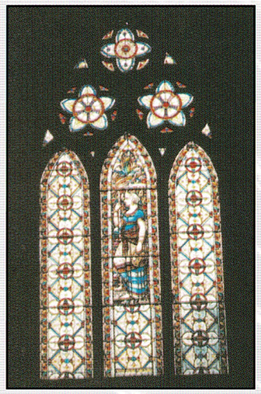
About twenty years ago the Crescent was in danger of collapse, as the facades were falling away. Fortunately the Council was able to step in at that time and carry out the necessary structural repairs. Sadly this was not done particularly well or sensitively, and involved destroying the internal plasterwork at the front of the properties, and lowering the internal ceilings at some of the front doorways. There are continuing problems with the roof, where some properties now have concrete tiles rather than the original slates, and as these are heavier, they have placed the roof timbers under stress. There may be further structural problems at the rear of parts of the Crescent, where broken drains have been allowed to flood the area, weakening the foundations and causing cracks in the rear façade due to subsidence. There are some properties that appear to be completely neglected: the main door flat at number 18, at the west end of the Crescent, was gutted by fire about three years ago, and although it has planning permission for conversion into flats, it remains derelict. Ironically the bronze plaque commemorating Thomson and identifying the Crescent as part of the heritage walk is located on the wall of this flat. It is important that a full structural survey of the fabric of the Crescent is carried out in the near future, to identify urgent repairs and prevent further deterioration. The residents of the Crescent, originally in the nineteenth century middle class tradesmen and professionals, have changed with the times, and currently there is a wide range of different cultures and economic backgrounds. Several flats are in licensed (and unlicensed) multiple occupation, which requires fire rating to internal doors and other alterations which are architecturally extremely unfortunate. Some flats are hostels for the homeless, while some have been well restored and let to residents who have lived in the area for decades. The ground at the rear of the Crescent has been largely neglected until recently, and has been something of a wilderness, vulnerable to raids by the local feral youth.



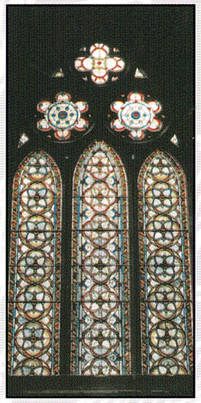
The price of flats in the Crescent represents good value when compared to flats of similar size in the West End, and the proximity to the Underground (Cessnock Station is actually built into the east end of the Crescent) offers quick transport to the city centre. The new BBC building, the new bridge and other developments nearby on the south side of the Clyde should create a better climate for the continuing appreciation and improvement of the area in general, and of Walmer Crescent in particular. The residents of the Crescent have recently formed The Walmer Crescent Association, (partly due to efforts by members of the Alexander Thomson Society) with the aim to improve and restore the Crescent and its immediate environment. Members represent some twenty five households in the Crescent, and membership is open to others with a genuine interest in the condition and welfare of the neighbourhood. There have been a number of litter clearing mornings, (which help neighbours to get to know each other better and form a genuine community), and the restoration and protection of the back gardens has commenced. It is proposed to seek funding for a professional feasibility study to be carried out, to include a structural and detailed condition survey, and to consider possible futures for the shops and landscape. This will then form the basis for applying for a grant to carry out the necessary repairs and longer term proposals which will restore the Crescent to its former glory.

The Alexander Thomson Society Winter Lectures
February 2006

There were four lectures which took place in March this year.



The series began with Max Donnelly who gave a lavishly illustrated talk on the work of Daniel Cottier who was at one time an artistic collaborator of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson. Cottier was revealed as an artist and designer of considerable productivity, the work ranging from the highly sensitive to the equally highly bizarre. Stained glass, furniture and interiors were given exhaustive coverage, his entire career mapped out by a highly informed commentary.









I delivered a talk which focussed on Thomson's commercial buildings, in particular the compositional techniques he employed in composing the buildings' facades. Thomson's skill lay in the proportioning of the façade within the given dimensions of a site and the repetitive interval of warehouse floor levels. His technique of layering the wall by ingenuously exploiting its depth progressively led to the idea of the loading bearing, masonry screen in which there is more glass than stone.



Ray Mackenzie reprised a previous talk about his research into building sculpture in Glasgow by focussing on the sculpture to be found in Paisley. Hugely informative, the talk offered fascinating insights into the work of various sculptors working in the nineteenth and earlier half of the twentieth centuries such as William Dawson and Gertrude Alice Meredith Williams.

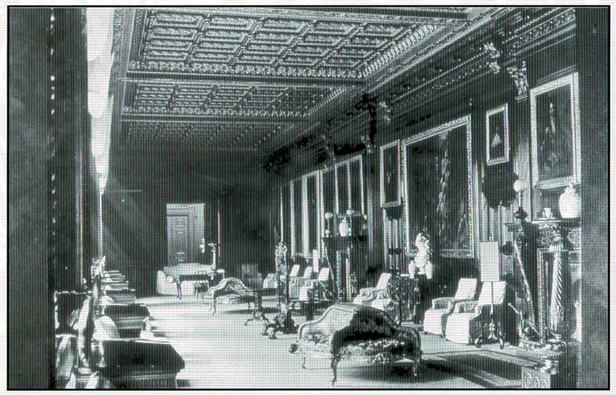




NORTH FRONT - HAMILTON PALACE

In the last of the series, the historian James Macaulay delivered an account of the work of David Hamilton. He reminded the audience that although David Hamilton is remembered today for his works in Glasgow his chief work was the enlargement of Hamilton Palace, Scotland's premier house, for the Duke of Hamilton. The talk was laced with anecdote and delivered with the speaker's characteristic sense of wry humour.

The Committee would welcome suggestions for talks and speakers for next year's series.



CASES

EGYPTIAN HALLS - neglected for 20 years. The £3.7m first stage of a scheme to transform this A-listed building by Thomson was publicised recently. The Dundee-based developer, Union Street Properties, is working out a compensation package to resolve legal agreements with Glasgow City Council which will allow the restoration project to start on site in seven months time.

The Egyptian Halls, on Union Street opposite Central Station, are one of the country's most celebrated architectural masterpieces and have been included among a Scottish Civic Trust list of more than 100 important buildings at risk. The restoration is expected to be completed by November 2008. The plans, inline with its listed building status, include repairing the four-storey building, replacing windows and floors, installing fire escapes and cleaning stonework.

St Vincent Street Church We still unfortunately have no news about the fate of the St Vincent Street Church.

'Greek Thomson' 60 Steps Preservation Trust'

The 'Greek Thomson' 60 Steps Preservation Trust have progressed considerably and now have a completed Feasibility Study that will enable further funding applications to be prepared and a Phasing Programme agreed.

The next stage for the Trust will be to hold a Public Meeting in September to discuss proposals and developments with owners and interested residents.

UNVEILING THE STONE

A memorial to Alexander Thomson was unveiled by Lord Provost Liz Cameron at his grave in the Southern Necropolis in May this year. The black granite monument which cost approximately £25,000 was designed by Graeme Andrew and Edward Taylor, architecture students at the time, who won the competition in 1999. At the ceremony were Thomson's descendants, Elizabeth Cook, great granddaughter, May MacDonald, great, great, granddaughter and Emma Reid, great, great, great, granddaughter.





WALKS BY ROGER GUTHRIE

The west end festival walks were well attended and Doors Open Day walks of Dennistoun and Crosshill look at the conservation areas, buildings, materials, architects and detailing. Crosshill walk includes the Thomson tenement on Allison St - details of all walks and tickets in DOD leaflet. New walk for DOD is Walmer Crescent looking at this one listed building conservation area. Still to come are the Cove and Kilcreggan walk (see front page - how to book) and the walk from Pollock House to Holmwood - afternoon tea (£2)at Holmwood - bus back to Pollock House Phone 0141 637 2129 for details and how to book.

15th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2005

Draft minutes of the 15th Annual General Meeting of the Alexander Thomson Society, held on Thursday 24th November 2005 at Hutchesons' Hall, Ingram Street, Glasgow.

Apologies
48 apologies were received from members unable to attend the meeting.

Minutes of the 14th AGM
Minutes of the 14th AGM were circulated and approved. Proposed Joanne Smith, seconded Roger Guthrie.

Chairman's Report
Kenneth Burns informed the members present that after a slow start he was of the opinion that the Society had survived a difficult period and was now on track to effectively carry out its aims relating to the promotion of Alexander Thomson and supporting the protection of his surviving works.

Vice Chairman's Report
Mark Baines confirmed that no progress had been made in identifying any plans to address serious concerns about St Vincent St Church, Egyptian Halls and Caledonia Road Church, three major Thomson buildings at risk and all within ownership of Glasgow City Council.

Thomson's 60 Steps and Walmer Crescent may soon be benefiting from the establishment of a Building Preservation Trust for the 60 Steps, and a Residents' Association for Walmer Cres.

Glasgow University had discovered elements of an original stencilled decorative scheme under wallpaper in the 2 public rooms of Lilybank House. Historic Scotland specialists had been on site to record and further investigate the scheme before the remainder of the repairs were completed.

Hon. Secretary's Report
Sally White reported on activities of the Society, these being an interesting and well attended 2005 Lecture Series with Ray McKenzie, Dr James McAuley, Max Donnelly and Mark Baines contributing.

Guided walks to Cove, West End, Dennistoun, Holmwood and the Doors Open Weekend tour of The Necropolis followed by a good evening in Cathedral House Hotel.

Thanks to everyone who participated and to those involved in organizing events.

Hon. Treasurer's Report
Joanne Smith reported on the Society's income and expenditure accounts for the previous 12 months. Copies of the accounts were available and were accepted by the members present.

Due to mail problems and computer handover of membership it was proposed that anyone who has not had their membership fees cheque cashed, would not be pursued for payment, and it is hoped that we have not lost any members due to this mix up.

Calendars would be available to purchase after the meeting, and the Society's first venture in this has resulted in an excellent design thanks to Ruth Johnston.

Elections of Office Bearers
Kenneth Burns thanked Jim Thomson and Richard Myall for their contributions to the Society, following their decisions to stand down as committee members.
A vote of thanks was also given to Bob Stewart who had continued to act as Membership Secretary until it was possible to handover to Brenda Lillicrap.

Current Office bearers Mark Baines, Joanne Smith, Brenda Lillicrap and Sally White were re-elected.

Robin Webster was proposed to join the committee by Kenneth Burns and seconded by Mark Baines. This was accepted.

AOCB
The following suggestions were made by members attending the meeting :-

Contact Viscount Linley following his criticism of the neglect of St Vincent St Church

Update the Web site to include events and news.

Continue expanding the events programme.

It was agreed that these ideas would be actioned and feedback provided to members.

Kenneth Burns thanked members and closed the meeting.

THE ALEXANDER THOMSON SOCIETY

STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
1 November 2004 to 31 October 2005

INCOME	Notes	2005 £	2004 £
Subscriptions		3,910.00	4,266.00
Sale of Goods	1	40.00	34.45
Book Royalties		0.00	0.00
Donations	2	183.22	42.00
Transferred from Savings		0.00	0.00
Bank Interest	3	62.06	32.16
Lectures/Events	4	210.00	228.00
Gift Aid	5	1,409.20	0.00
Total		5,814.48	4,602.61
EXPENDITURE			
Subscriptions		0.00	222.13
Administration	6	859.44	1,808.53
Cost of Goods	7	1,151.40	0.00
Lectures/Events	8	675.75	0.00
Transferred to Savings		0.00	3,000.00
Miscellaneous	9	617.55	492.87
Total		3,304.14	5,523.53
Profit/(Deficit)		2,510.34	-920.92
Assets			
Premier Account		5,093.20	5,037.98
Current Account		4,441.53	1,931.19
TOTAL		9,534.73	6,969.17

15 November 2005

Prepared by Joanne B Smith, Treasurer

Examined by Jan E Margetts

THE
ALEXANDER THOMSON
SOCIETY

Founded in 1991 to promote the life and works of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson (1817-1875)

Patrons of the Scoiety:
The Earl of Glasgow
Professor Andor Gomme
Professor Andrew McMillan

Chairman: Kenneth Burns

Vice Chairman: Mark Baines

Hon Secretary: Sally White

Hon Treasurer: Joanne Smith

Membership Secretary: Brenda Lillicrap

Members of the committee::
Roger Guthrie, Lesley Kerr,
Colin McCluskey, Ruth Johnston,
Dr Anne Walker,
Professor Robin Webster

External Examiner of the Society's Accounts:
Frances Manley

Registered as a Society with Charitable purposes No SC021447

The Greek Thomson Society Newsletter is published by The Alexander Thomson Society, Holmwood, 61-63 Netherlee Rd, Cathcart, Glasgow G44 3YU to whom all enquiries and correspondence should be addressed.

website: www.greekthomson.com

PLEASE NOTE
Back Issues of the Newsletter are available from Holmwood at the address above.

This newsletter was designed & produced by Johnstondesign 0141 554 7207

MEMBERS OFFERS

VIDEO

Murray Grigor's video 'NINEVEH ON THE CLYDE, THE ARCHITECTURE OF ALEXANDER 'GREEK' THOMSON' (Award for the video - see page 2)

The 55 minute video includes additional footage not seen in its original television showing.The video is available in VHS (also NTSC format for US viewers).
The Video is available to Society members at a special price of £12.00, inclusive of P&P.

BOOKS

In 'THE LIGHT OF TRUTH AND BEAUTY', Alexander Thomson's public lectures are brought together in a single volume. They reveal him as a powerful and eloquent speaker, and confirm that not only was he one of the most original architects of his time, but also that his was one of the greatest minds in Scottish architecture.
Published at £9.95 paperback and £16.95 hardback, as a member of The Alexander Thomson Society you can save almost 50% on the retail cost of the book.
Paperback: £6.00 (inclusive of P&P)
Hardback: £11.00 (inclusive of P&P)

In 'THE EGYPTIAN REVIVAL' by James Stevens Curl he describes the numerous revivals of the Egyptian Style from Antiquity to the present day. This pioneering and definitive work brilliantly analyses the astonishing persistance of Egyptianising themes through the last two thousand years. (608 pages) Published at £27.50 paperback, £80.00 Hardback - members of The Alexander Thomson Society can save 20% on the retail cost of the book.
Paperback: £23.50 Hardback: £68.00
P&Packing UK 5% Europe 10% RoW 15%

THE ALEXANDER THOMSON SOCIETY
Committee members for next year

If any members would like to join the committee please contact us before the AGM to allow us to put your name forward at the meeting. Either write to the Holmwood address or phone Ruth Johnston 0141 554 7207.